Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) is a celebration from Mexico and Latin America when families gather to honor the memory of deceased loved ones on November 1 and 2. Spirits are guided home to enjoy offerings left for them on meticulously crafted altars. This day’s roots are a fusion of traditions found in Europe and Mesoamerica, particularly the ancient Aztec empire.

The altar is a complex creation with incredible symbolism as each element carries specific meaning. Here are the most important elements and what they mean.

### Levels
“Ofrendas” can be made several levels.
- **2 LEVELS** represent the division between the earth and the sky.
- **3 LEVELS** represent the sky, the earth and the underworld.
- **7 LEVELS** are the most common and relate to the seven levels that a soul must traverse before reaching heaven (or hell). It also relates to the Seven Deadly Sins.

### Arch
The arch represents the passage between life and death.

### Fire
Fire in the form of candles and torches are symbols of our love for our deceased relatives and guiding lights for their spirits.

### Paper
"Ofrendas" usually have “papel picado” or tissue paper with intricate designs. They are a representation of the union between life and death, the wind, and the fragility of life.

### Portrait
A photo of the deceased loved one to whom the altar is paying tribute is placed at the top and in the middle of the altar.

### Incense
A chalice with incense is placed on the altar. It is a way to purify the souls of the dead and ward off evil spirits.

### Banquet
To celebrate the arrival of deceased loved ones, their favorite foods and drinks are placed on the altar as an offering.

### Typical Food
As well as the deceased’s favorite food items, altars usually contain traditional Day of the Dead food items such as Pan de Muerto, rice, mole, pumpkins, sugar cane, jicama and oranges — the fruits of the season.

### Sugar skulls
“Calaveras” or skulls are representations of deceased relatives. Made of sugar or chocolate and often consumed by kids after the celebration, they are an example of the Mexican ability to celebrate, mock and play with death.

### White Cross
A cross made of slaked lime is drawn on the ground under the altar. It originally represented the four cardinal points corresponding to the four elements. Now it is also a representation of the Christian cross.

### Toys
Toys are used as offerings on altars dedicated to children who passed away.